

***Historical imagination with Ayman Al-Attoom -The novel
of “The Road to Hell” as a sample –***

التخيل التاريخي عند أيمن العتوم – رواية "طريق جهنم" أنموذجا

Ali arioua farouk¹

Radja mestour^{*}

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Abstract:

The contemporary world exhibits growing interest in history, in general, and in historical events, in particular; a phenomenon that's continuously reflected in the novelistic domain. The novel constitutes a fertile field where history and narration intertwine, giving rise to works categorized under the newly proposed term 'historical imagination'. Ayman Al-Attoom's novel 'The Road to Hell' exemplifies this, shedding light on a tributary of Arab literature—prison literature—through narration blending reality, fiction, and storytelling. In this study, we engage with theoretical frameworks concerning narration, history, and memory, culminating in our proposal of the term 'historical imagination'. The second section examines the novel's evocation of memory, its historical imagination, and its historical referents concerning depicted events. Furthermore, it analyzes these elements at the level of textual thresholds' discourse particularly title, cover image and narrative structure

¹ Ali arioua farouk –Laboratory of Literary and Critical Studies.

ef.ali-arioua@univ-blida2.dz

^{*} Radja mestour -Laboratory of Literary and Critical Studies.

r.mestour@univ-blida2.dz

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ملخص:

تعد الرواية المساحة الأكبر والحقل الخصب في إعادة كتابة التاريخ، بعيدا عن منطق الأرشيف والتأريخ الرسمي، فتمنح الرواية صوتا لمن صمتهم التاريخ، فالتخيل التاريخي من أبرز الآليات الفنية التي توظفها الرواية الحديثة لإعادة قراءة التاريخ وإنتاج دلالات جديدة تنبع من تفاعل الذاكرة مع أحداث الحاضر، فهو لا يقتصر على استعادة أحداث التاريخ كما وقعت، بل يتجاوز ذلك إلى إعادة تشكيلها وفق رؤية تخيلية تنضجها ذات الكاتب، وتغذيها الحاجة إلى مساءلة ما جرى، وإعادة بنائه عبر منظور أدبي جمالي وفكري، لتكون رواية "طريق جهنم" للكاتب "أيمن العتوم" الذي سلب الضوء على أحد روافد الأدب العربي ألا وهو أدب السجون، في عمل سردي امتزج فيه الواقع والتخيل والسرد، تطرقنا في ورقتنا البحثية إلى قراءات نظرية حول السرد والتاريخ والذاكرة، حيث توصلنا إلى تبني مصطلح "التخيّل التاريخي"، وفي الجزء الثاني وقفنا على استدعاء الذاكرة والتخيّل التاريخي وكذا المرجع التاريخي لأحداث الرواية وعلى مستوى خطاب العتبات (العنوان وصورة الغلاف) والبنية السردية.

كلمات مفتاحية: التخيّل التاريخي؛ الذاكرة؛ العتبات؛ العتوم.

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Corresponding author: Ali arioua farouk. ef.ali-arioua@univ-blida2.dz

1. INTRODUCTION

Interest in history and issues of memory has been growing, and this has been reflected in contemporary fiction through questioning history and delving into the labyrinth of memory. This trend responds to a renewed social demand for revisiting the past and a desire to construct somewhat cohesive narrative identities.

Recently, we have observed novelists immersing themselves in recent and not-so-recent history with perspectives that radically differ from the conceptions held for decades. They have begun excavating the obscured corners of memory, with a notable tendency among contemporary novelists to amplify the voices of minorities, marginalized groups, outcasts, and all those who are different—especially those languishing in the darkness of prison cells. A prime example is the Jordanian writer Ayman Al-Attoom’s novel “The Road to Hell”, which takes us into a dark era of Libyan prisons, positioning itself within the tradition of prison literature through his novelistic works.

This study aims to shed light on the intersections and reverberations of history and memory on both theoretical and practical levels. The first part will explore the theoretical interactions that have reshaped the concept of history and historical fiction, placing memory at the center of scholarly, research, and creative concerns. The second part will analyze “The Road to Hell” as a narration that engages in "historical imagination," activating memories and historical references through diverse techniques.

2. Theoretical reading about narration, history, and memory:

We firstly begin by reviewing the debates that have surrounded both historical and literary studies engaging with history, tracing their consensus on the narrative nature of both history and fiction. This serves as a foundation for the emergence of memory studies and their growing appeal to scholars in the fields of history and literature.

2.1. History, Imagination, and Narration:

The relationship between narration and history is profound. It has evolved from claims of objectivity and the denial of narration interpretive function to bringing it into the open—culminating in what is now known as new historicism.

The connection between narration and history is not merely structural. Rather, the interplay between them lies in their shared narrative quality, where fictional texts (such as novels) and historical discourse converge. This challenge the classical conception of history, which is defined as:

"A verbal structure in the form of a prose narrative discourse that claims to be a model or an icon of past structures and processes, aiming to interpret them through representation."(White, H, 2016, p129) Unlike historians who must ground their discourse in documented evidence, novelists are under no obligation to legitimize their narrations through archival sources. As one critic observes:

"The historian is bound to a specific time period and clearly identified figures, whereas the novelist generates multiple temporal dimensions from historical documents - encompassing both what was and what could have been. From actual historical figures, the novelist derives imagined characters, giving life not

only to those who once drew breath but also to beings born and perished within the converging letters of a text.”(Darraj, F, 2004, p162)

The recent rapid developments in postmodern thought have prompted a re-examination of the relationship between narration and history on one hand, and between fictional and non-fictional narration on the other. The skepticism toward positivist and empirical theories of knowledge has led to a comprehensive reconsideration of both novelistic and historical writings. As one theorist notes:

“Real-world events do not inherently coalesce in narrative form. If we treat them as though they do, we risk appearing unrealistic—not merely due to lack of evidence or implausibility, but because every narrative discourse inevitably distorts the events it recounts by virtue of its very form.”(Carr, D, 2019, p 146)

For literary theory, one consequence of this view is an understanding of narrative fiction that emphasizes its autonomy and separation from the real world. For historiography, it manifests as profound skepticism toward historical narration accounts." This theoretical perspective has highlighted the common ground between novels and history due to their shared narrative nature.

Arjun Appadurai argues that completely erasing the boundaries between what constitutes 'truth' and what counts as 'fiction' or 'falsehood' remains impossible. While collective memories often render a society's past debatable within specific

contexts, historical narrations maintain a fundamental credibility threshold. As he observes:

“We distinguish between historical narration and fiction because each requires a different type of credibility—a need that is both contingent and essential. It is contingent because some narrations straddle the boundary between fiction and history, while others occupy an ambiguous space that seems to deny the existence of such a boundary altogether. Yet it remains essential because historically situated communities must ultimately determine whether a given narration belongs to history or fiction. In other words, the epistemological division between history and fiction consistently manifests through historically grounded evaluations of specific narrations.” (Trouillot, M.-R, 2019, p 166)

The historical discourse and aesthetic discourse converge in a single narrative form—the historical novel—which combines the scientific rigor and objectivity of history with the poetic artistry of storytelling. As critics note:

“This narrative form is torn between two referential frameworks: the first rooted in historical truth, the second in fictional imagination. Satisfying the first framework demands documentary credibility, while fulfilling the second requires artistic authenticity. Perhaps the ultimate achievement of the historical novel lies in successfully reconciling these dual demands of veracity.” (Shammali, N, 2011, p 187)

Abdullah Ibrahim proposes replacing the term 'historical novel' with the new concept of 'historical imagination,' arguing the former no longer accurately represents this narrative form. He contends: "The time has come for "historical imagination" to

supplant "historical novel," as this shift would propel historical narrative writing beyond the constraints of literary genres—their boundaries and functions. It dismantles the novel/history binary, reintegrating them into a new narrative identity beholden to neither. This approach sidesteps debates about narrative imaginaries' adherence to historical referents, instead opening pathways to writing that: explores parallel resonances between past and present, uncovers symbolic representations within history, and revives reflections, destinies, tensions, value collapses, and outstanding aspirations. These elements become organizing frameworks for events and meanings. Ultimately, the expansive trajectories of historical imagination shift narrative writing from confined generic limitations to open horizons embracing both past and present." (Ibrahim, 2011, p 5)

Historical imagination constitutes an enduring construct that draws its subject matter from history and its form from narration. It does not directly reference historical facts as such, but rather uses them as a foundation for imaginative writing and a cultural frame of reference. This approach both enriches and is enriched by history, establishing a relationship of mutual reinforcement without overt ideological rigidity.

Emerging in response to nations' yearning for past glories, this narrative form confronts contemporary cultural, social, and particularly political crises. Following World War II, societies began seeking cultural identities distinct from their colonizers' frameworks. Historical narration thus became a vehicle for uncovering and consolidating identity—where history functions as both sanctuary and sacred reference, possessing intrinsic appeal and sanctity.

The narrator does not reproduce history but is guided by its illumination. For the novelist, history is not a subject but a symbol and meaning: "The novelist is unconcerned with history as an object of description, exposure, or interpretation, for the novelist serves no historian. If history captivates, it is because it acts like a spotlight rotating around human existence—revealing both visible realities and unrealized potentials that remain invisible during stagnant epochs when history lies dormant." (Kundera, M, 2006, p 60)

The convergence of the novel and history occurred relatively late, dating to the early nineteenth century or slightly earlier. As documented: "The historical novel emerged at the dawn of the nineteenth century, approximately during Napoleon's downfall, with Walter Scott's *Waverley* appearing in 1814. Admittedly, earlier novels treating historical subjects can be found in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries." (Lukács, G. n.d, p 11)

2.2. Memory Challenges Within Historical and Literary Studies:

Our era demonstrates growing scholarly engagement with memory studies. Recent twentieth-century historical developments have reconfigured humanity's relationship with temporality, destabilizing traditional paradigms. Within this context, Jurji Zaydan stands as the pioneering innovator of this hybrid narrative form in the Arab literature. He systematically rewrote Arab-Islamic history through compelling narrative techniques aimed—in his view—at purely pedagogical objectives. For Zaydan, history cannot be comprehended in isolation nor effectively learned unless presented to youth

through distinguished narrative vessels. Here, narrative functions as both exception and instrument, while history remains the ultimate objective. As Zaydan himself articulated: 'Recognizing the deficiency among Arabic readers—across all intellectual orientations and schools—in accessing their own historical legacy (the history of their language, nation, and lands; indeed, their civilizational, literary, and cultural heritage), we have undertaken to publish accessible historical materials where need is greatest. Through serialized Islamic historical novels in al-Hilal magazine, we prepare readers of varying backgrounds and intellectual capacities to engage with history. Exclusively reading unadorned history proves burdensome for the general readership, particularly in our regions where scholarly culture remains nascent. We must therefore employ resourceful pragmatism in disseminating knowledge—making reading desirable through historical fiction, the optimal vehicle for this purpose.' (Zaydan, J, n.d, p.7)

Jurji Zaydan sought to resurrect Islamic history through fictional narrative, deliberately liberating his narration from strict historical fidelity by incorporating imaginative elements. This approach drew criticism from contemporaries who accused him of: distorting historical records, trivializing documented sources, aligning with Orientalist agendas aimed at undermining Islamic culture. As his detractors argued: 'Historical novels invite multiple critiques precisely because their imaginative license—through additions, omissions, and blending of fact with fiction—enables problematic reconstructions. Zaydan imposes fictionalized romantic subplots onto political conflicts within Islamic history, despite lacking credible textual evidence in

authoritative sources. He strategically selects sensitive moments representing sectarian or factional power struggles, while conspicuously avoiding pivotal epochs. This selective narration manifests clearly in his works: *Girl of Ghassane* sidesteps Islam's emergence during the Prophet's era, *Armānūsah* omits the Islamic conquest of Egypt, neither addresses Islam's formative expansion period." (Badr, A. M. T, 1993, p 99)

The term "historical imagination" is more liberating than "historical novel." Imagination involves the evocation, inspiration, and embodiment of a historical event or a symbolic figure from history, rather than merely replicating or retrieving historical facts. Modern narrative perspectives on history have evolved to the point where the narrator can imagine alternative outcomes, alter the course of the narrative, and shed light on details that official history either neglected or silenced. Historical imagination, therefore, expands across historical realities—touching them without adhering strictly to them. It bridges the gap between historical material and fictional creation". (Ibrahim, 2011, p 33) Accordingly, the term historical imagination appears more inclusive of the new historical narrations that reawaken ancient history in ways that align with the demands of the contemporary era and its cultural context, as well as with the conditions and conventions of narrative form. In this literary art, the narrator "artistically reshapes history according to stylistic and rhetorical directives, through omission, addition, projection, and adaptation within a dynamic imaginative framework and a novelistic reference shaped by genre awareness and the reader's horizon of expectation. This grants the novelist the ability to liberate history from its original context and intentions, and to connect it with interpretations that primarily concern the present

and the future." (Halifi, S, 2009, p26), In this mode of narration, history emerges as renewed—free and unbound—having been liberated from the constraints of the past and the burdens of documentation, attribution, and traditional reference.

3. The Reconstruction of Memory and the Reanimation of History in Ayman Al-Attoom’s Novel “The Road to Hell”:

Based on these theoretical premises—and building upon them—we aim to examine the formations of historical material as conveyed through narration in “The Road to Hell”. Our focus will be on the mechanisms through which memory and historical reference are invoked within the novelistic narration.

3.1. Memory and Thresholds’ discourse (Cover Pictures and Title):

The title threshold holds particular significance among both internal and external textual thresholds, due to its position, importance, and semantic value within the text. For this reason, it has garnered considerable attention on two levels: the level of critical discourse and the level of literary discourse. Arab critics, for instance, have been engaging with the phenomenon of titling since 1968, and studies on the subject have become so in-depth that the field has been referred to as the "science of titling." On the level of literary discourse, the title has gained paramount importance—serving not only as a promotional marker but also as an authoritative element that guides the reading process. In light of the overwhelming volume and diversity of literary production today, writers have shown great concern for their titles, demonstrating creativity and innovation in crafting them to attract readers, capture their attention, and disrupt their horizon

of expectations. As a result, authors often compete in selecting elusive and enigmatic titles for their works. The strategies authors employ in constructing and inventing their titles vary and may reflect a specific intention or ideology unique to the writer. Thus, the title has come to be seen as a discourse in its own right, possessing its own literariness, poetic charge, and boundless potential to generate meaning. In this regard, the novelist Ayman Al-Attoom has adopted a consistent strategy across all his novels, deriving his titles from Qur'anic verses, as seen in: (*O My Two Companions of the Prison*), (*They Hear Its Moaning*), (*The Soldiers' Speech*), (*Desolate*), (*A Band of Jinn*), (*The Taste of Death*), (*The Word of Allah*), (*His Name Is Ahmad*), and (*Nineteen*). In contrast to these titles, however, the novel *The Road to Hell* stands apart in its titling approach.

Ayman Al-Atoum devotes considerable attention to the selection of titles for all his literary works—both novels and poetry—recognizing that the title is the first element encountered by the reader. As Dr. Abdelmalek Achehboun states: “An active critical approach to the relationship between thresholds and the paratexts surrounding the central text has gradually transformed the concept of the threshold from being viewed as a marginal textual component to being regarded as a structural element in its own right—one with distinct formal characteristics and semantic functions that allow it to engage in a dynamic, creative dialogue with other equally complex textual structures, such as the main text and the horizon of expectation.” (Achehboun, A, 2009, p.27)

Textual thresholds serve as expressions of a particular stance and play a fundamental role in guiding the reader into the author's world and facilitating their gradual immersion within it.

They define the text’s identity, offer initial stylistic and semantic cues, and construct a potential imaginative universe. Thresholds are generally classified into two categories:

3.1.1. Surrounding Thresholds and texts: These are further divided into:

- A. External Thresholds: This category includes all elements found on the book’s outer cover—such as the title, author’s name, genre designation, and cover image—as well as the content of the back cover.
- B. Internal Thresholds: These include the dedication, foreword, introductory texts, internal titles, footnotes, and the epilogue.

3.1.2 Subsequent Adjacent Texts: These consist of interviews, confessions, testimonies, and journalistic interrogations.

Such thresholds play a crucial role in generating meaning and contributing to the author’s intended message.

In this context, “The Road to Hell” emerges with a jarring title that provokes numerous questions in the mind of the reader or recipient, marking a departure from what they may have come to expect from the novelist Ayman Al-Attoom. The title takes the form of a nominal phrase, which typically connotes stillness and calm. The word “road” appears in an indefinite form, opening the door to multiple interpretations—perhaps most notably, the idea of an unknown path, one marked by suffering and endless torment. The word “Hell”, in turn, evokes the fate reserved for disbelievers and idolaters—the punishment for those who stray from the path of truth. Grammatically, it is a diptote, and semantically, it signifies an end filled with intense pain and suffering. Every literary work presents, from its very outset—

and indeed from its title—a set of indicators that help the reader reduce the ambiguity of the text before them. These clues may be morphological, syntactic, or semantic, and they rely on the prior existence of a cultural framework that narrows the multiplicity of interpretations by situating the work within broader intellectual or aesthetic paradigms”. (Palyt, B, 1992, p.84)

The title is written in deep crimson—a blood-red hue—through which the author seeks to convey multiple layered messages. This choice of color signals that the story originates from a grim and painful reality, specifically the scenes of torture, suffering, and cries echoing from within the cells of a Libyan prison. The red evokes not only blood, but also a profound sense of sorrow, distance, longing, and endless nights spent in the company of pain—nights marked by sleeping on bare ground and being wrapped in utter darkness within a narrow, suffocating hole.

The title dominates the novel’s cover in large, bold letters set against a backdrop of gray clouds. To anyone browsing the cover, these somber, melancholic hues immediately draw the eye and evoke the novel’s harrowing events, from the echoes of prisoners’ voices to their anguished cries.

“A sign that is manifest and thus points to what lies beneath or is absent—hence the saying ‘that which is apparent is the title of what is concealed.’ A title is a sequence of words that serves as the preface to a study or story, or as the key to a discipline, or as an introduction. In logic, the ‘title of a subject’ is its conceptual designation and description; and in a logical proposition, the subject is that which predicates are affirmed of.” (Karmi, S, n.d, p.282)

Leo Hook defines the title as “a set of linguistic signs that can be inscribed on a text to designate it, to point to its general content, and also to attract the reader.” (Rahim, A, 2008, pp.2-3) Dominating the cover is also an image of two hands, stained with blood from torture and wounds, soiled by neglect, filth, and the absence of humanity. These hands grip barbed wire, which has intensified their agony—tearing fresh wounds and perhaps reopening old ones—hands that seem to beseech aid and relief from an indifferent void, yet no one hears and no one responds.

The title recurs throughout the novelistic narration: the prisoners dubbed the corridor leading to their cells the Road to Hell because the jailer divided them into two paths. The left path was known as the Road to Hell for the torture, brutalization, and killings it entailed; the right path, by contrast, was hellish only to a lesser degree. From this grim designation, Ayman Al-Atoum drew his novel’s title—a choice both poignant and fitting, given the anguish and cries it evokes. The title is imbued with deep, symbolically charged meaning. The word “road” suggests a journey or trajectory, inviting inquiry into the nature of that path and whether it is chosen or imposed. The word “Hell,” on the other hand, traditionally connotes punishment and agonizing ends, hinting at the presence of either internal or external conflict within the narration.

Accordingly, the title appears to denote a journey fraught with challenges—psychological, spiritual, or even physical—and may also be read as signaling the protagonist’s fraught decisions that lead to dire consequences. Alternatively, it might function as a metaphor for a harsh social reality or a destructive political system. In compelling readers to ask what this road is and why it

is bound to Hell, the title provokes curiosity while signaling the novel's likely engagement with profound social or philosophical critiques of human suffering and the exigencies of choice.

3.2. The Narrative Structure and Memory Multiplicity Within the Novel:

Ayman Al-Attoom's novel "The Road to Hell" is one of those literary works that combines narrative depth with structural mastery. It is characterized by its ability to evoke existential and social issues through a cohesive narrative framework. The narrative structure can be analyzed according to the following elements:

3.2.1. Temporal Framework:

1. Temporal Interweaving: Al-Atoum makes extensive use of the flash-back technique, allowing the reader to explore events from multiple perspectives. He reconstructs the past in its psychological and political dimensions, thereby illuminating its influence on both the present and the future. For example:

“I was still a young man of twenty-two when I was thrown in here. I had just got a good job, and the crushing poverty we had endured over the previous two decades was beginning to recede. I now earned a salary that spared me from hardship and even made life sweet and beautiful. I was determined to make up to my mother for every deprivation and loss she had suffered, to return something of the kindness she had lavished on me.” (Al-Attoom, A, 2018, p 75)

“Thus, he became the longest-serving Libyan inmate, spending thirty-one years in his country's prisons. Eighteen of

those years were spent in the so-called “Mahqara,” and he endured nearly a decade in solitary confinement, with nothing before him but the cell walls—no space in which to move, the six enclosing walls bearing down on him as if they were a grave...”(Al-Attoom, A, 2018, p 90)

2. Temporal Tension: The oscillation between present and past is employed to generate an atmosphere of suspense and to keep the reader continually engaged with the narration.

“As days passed, those with money began buying snippets of newspapers: ‘Pay to survive.’ Very few were saved. We were poor and had little to dream about. The jailer grew more sympathetic; money softens hearts, and the gleam of silver dazzles one’s senses. We started giving him money in return of the newspaper headlines that reached the prison warden’s office. We couldn’t afford the papers themselves, so we settled for their headlines.” (Al-Attoom, A, 2018, p 246)

He adds: “No one knows what he’s thinking; eyes can sometimes betray a person—but his eyes said nothing. They were utterly motionless, as if they were made of glass.” (Al-Attoom, A, 2018, p 247)

At midday on a sweltering summer’s day, I observed him clad in a collared woolen sweater. I was struck by the incongruity—how could he wear such a garment in that oppressive heat? Yet I refrained from asking, for he had not responded to anyone’s queries for quite some time. Night fell and passed, and at dawn—just before the sunrise—he called out to me....”(Al Atoum, A, 2018, p 247)

The novel “The Road to Hell” spans 500 pages and is quintessential prison literature—Libyan prisons, to be precise—where it vividly portrays the various modes of torture and forms of degradation under Muammar Gaddafi’s regime.

“Torture was a method, a way of life, a temporal regimen imposed on us. It bore no relation to any justifying cause; rather, it was dictated by time, and its rules were uncompromising. The ordeal was recommenced every two days unless some other exigency intervened.” (Al Atoum, A, 2018, p 80)

The novel unfolds across two distinct temporal settings. The first is the year 1973, when “Ali al-‘Akrami,” the story’s orphaned protagonist, is imprisoned—detained for possessing books that Muammar Qaddafi had banned during his so-called Cultural Revolution. The second temporal frame is the 2011 Arab Uprising, during which the author gives voice to Qaddafi himself, exposing the extent of the conspiracies and intrigues arrayed against him. Each of Qaddafi’s sections is rendered in dense, weighty prose:

“Were my people anything more than a host of nomadic Bedouins, their heads to their heels blanketed in dust, the bare earth filling the corners of their open mouths? They were unclothed, so I clothed them; they were hungry, so I fed them; they were lost, so I guided them; they were deprived, so I endowed them. I granted them a glory no nation had ever known—what, then, is the recompense for such beneficence, if not further beneficence?” (Al Atoum, A, 2018, p 86)

In his novel *The Road to Hell*, Ayman Al-Atoum employs the technique of historical imagination, drawing upon events that are either factual or inspired by history and reconfiguring them

within a fictional framework to convey his humanitarian and ethical messages while shedding light on existential and political concerns.

4. Historical Imagination Aspects Within the Novel:

4.1. Aspiring Events from Contemporary Reality:

The novel is grounded in actual events related to Libyan prisons under Muammar Qaddafi’s regime—particularly those that housed political detainees—and the suffering endured by inmates under torture and repression. The author meticulously depicts the human-rights violations committed against them, drawing on testimonies and experiences that have been imaginatively reconstructed and narratively adapted.

4.2. Integrating Facts within Imagination:

Ayman Al-Attoom does not merely document events; he re-casts them in richly poetic, imaginative language, thereby infusing the narrative with profound dramatic and human dimensions. Although the characters in his novel may appear to be drawn from real life, they acquire a symbolic quality that transcends temporal and geographic boundaries, ultimately embodying universal aspects of human suffering.

4.3. Humanitarian and Political Issues:

Through historical imagination, Al-Attoom addresses themes of oppression, torture, the miscarriage of justice, and betrayal. Although these issues are situated within specific historical contexts, they are presented in such a way that they invite reflection at any time and in any place.

4.4. Symbolism and Generalization:

What renders the novel amenable to sustained reflection, interpretation, and rereading are the often deliberately vague names of its places and characters. This symbolic ambiguity enables the reader to map the events onto analogous experiences from history or contemporary reality.

5. Conclusion:

The Significance of Historical Imagination in Ayman Al-Attoom's novel "the Road to Hell" lies in the following points:

- **Illuminating Human Tragedy:** By imaginatively re-casting historical events, Al-Attoom penetrates to the heart of human suffering and presents it in a deeply affecting manner.
- **Reinforcing Ethical Values:** Historical imagination reshapes events to remind the reader of such fundamental values as freedom, dignity, and resistance.
- **Stimulating Critical Reflection:** Al-Attoom invites the reader to contemplate the relationship between past and present, prompting consideration of how—and whether—it is possible to transform reality.

Thus, *The Road to Hell* transcends the bounds of a mere narration recounting of specific events; it stands as a human testimony that re-reads history, using literary imagination to impart profound lessons and meanings.

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